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## *Agrilus biguttatus* F. (Col., Buprestidae) at Windsor; with some account of its history in Britain

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As a postscript to my paper on the rarer *Sternoxia* (Col.) of Windsor Forest (1966, *Ent. Rec.*, **78**: 14-23), I am pleased to be able to report that my friend Mr G. Shephard had the good fortune to capture a specimen of this handsome and now very rare Buprestid (the largest of the many European *Agrilus*) on 30th July last, in Windsor Great Park, Berks. (It is the *A. pannonicus* Pill. & Mitt. of Kloet & Hincks, 1945, but that name has not found favour on the Continent and the Fabrician name is in almost universal use.) The present find makes a highly notable addition to the long list of rarities from Windsor Forest, for which there appears to be not even an old record; and indeed it was a question whether the species still existed in our country,

since its continued survival in a restricted part of Sherwood Forest, Notts., is somewhat dubious—or at best precarious until the habitat is conserved. Other British stations for it are now, alas, a matter of ancient history—see further below.

Mr Shephard's example, a female which later laid many eggs, and in very fresh condition but for a damaged leg, was beaten from the foliage of a fairly old oak. Despite much search, no other could be found, which was hardly surprising in view of the late date. The insect could have bred out of that or some other old oak near at hand, but perhaps a likelier source was either some boughs lying under an oak not far off, or else a long row of logs (many of them oak) at a greater distance, brought from another part of the park and placed end to end to mark out a new roadway. In all three cases, examination failed to disclose likely-looking workings or exit-holes, but these might well have been hard to detect, and we hope to resume investigations next year.

It may be of interest to summarize what little is known of this as an indigenous British species. Apart from two old records (Hampstead and Cuckfield) by Stephens, of which nothing further is now known, the sole locality for very many years—which furnished all the specimens in our older collections—was the celebrated Darenth Wood in West Kent, also mentioned by Stephens, who says "on felled timber" (1839, *Man. Brit. Col.*: 173). Fowler (1890, *Col. Brit. Isl.*, 4: 70) writes on the adult habits "Found flying about old oak stumps, and settling on them". The following account is given by Rye & Fowler (1890, *Brit. Beetles*: 165): "*Agrilus biguttatus* . . . may be taken in all its stages in Darenth Wood at the end of June; its larvae work sinuous galleries in the damp bark of large oak stumps in open cuttings, that have been left for about two years in the ground, and turn to pupae in cells between the outer and inner layers; the perfect insects remaining quiescent therein for some time. This species . . . flies during the hot sunshine; and, on the least alarm, packs its limbs tight to its body, simulates death, and rolls to the ground." The species seems to have survived at Darenth up to somewhere about the turn of the century—perhaps rather later. I have heard that two or three collectors (notably Dr G. W. Nicholson) made a thorough but fruitless search for it there during the 1910's or 20's; and nothing more seems to have been heard of the beetle in its old haunt. Yet conceivably, it *may* still linger on; the locality is far less worked than formerly, and on some of my visits there I have noticed what looked like ideal sites. We are only just beginning to realize that certain insects apparently manage to survive at an extraordinarily low density for very long periods in a given locality, provided that suitable habitats remain.

An interesting new record appeared in Fowler & Donisthorpe, 1913, *Col. Brit. Isl.*, 6: 273, under *Agrilus biguttatus* F.: "Discovered in Sherwood Forest in numbers in July 1908 by Mr Donisthorpe, in a large living oak, in the thick bark." The

captor must have published a full account elsewhere, but I have no note of it. He told me (if memory serves) that he was being "shown round" by the forester when his eye chanced to light upon a specimen settled on a large limb fallen from an oak, and that on returning to the spot at the first opportunity he was able to locate the breeding site. I have, however, since been informed that the insect had previously been taken there by the late J. Kidson Taylor—a fact doubtless unknown to Donisthorpe. The subsequent history of *A. biguttatus* at Sherwood is sketchy, and I have seen nothing published; but Mr D. Tozer, who worked the Forest at a later period, obtained it sparingly in the Ollerton area. The examples he kindly gave me were taken in 1939; and he told me that they had to be dug (with much difficulty) out of the tree or trees in which they bred. This does not altogether square with the recorded habits of the beetle at Darenth. A fair inference, perhaps, is that while infesting living or at any rate standing trees its numbers are low and it is seldom seen; but that when oaks in its habitat are felled, conditions are created which favour its multiplication for a time at least, the stumps affording a breeding centre and focus of activity. One would also expect that like its congeners it should be procurable by beating the foliage of its host-trees, and possibly by sweeping near them.

I would here draw attention to a little-known New Forest record of *A. biguttatus*, which does not appear in Fowler & Donisthorpe (1913). The species is included in a list of captures in that locality by the late J. R. le B. Tomlin (1902, *Ent. mon. Mag.*, 37: 291), without any special remark or prominent notice, and is thus liable to be overlooked. Some years ago Mr Lionel Cowley kindly verified for me that a single specimen from the New Forest is extant in Tomlin's collection in the Cardiff Museum. I know of no other such capture and it is evident that, in view of all the collecting done there, this Buprestid must be, or have been, excessively rare or local in the Forest.

Finally, a specimen was taken by Mr B. L. J. Byerley in Bishop's Wood, Batchworth, Herts. (near Northwood, Middx.), by general sweeping, on 27.vi.53; see Allen, 1958, *Ent. mon. Mag.*, 94: 52. As there related, I joined the captor in a search for the species on 29.vi.57 (a very hot day)—without result. Nor has anything further been seen of it in the wood, despite frequent visits in season by Mr Byerley. It seems that the beetle is occasionally introduced into this country in timber from the Continent; it is possible, therefore, that the specimen in question was of adventive origin.

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## Mainly South Essex, 1971

By R. TOMLINSON

Ray Cook and I had planned to visit Crabb Wood, near Winchester, to try for *Trichopteryx polycommata* D. & Schiff., for some time, so the afternoon of 28th March saw me riding the